

How do Women Impact on Peacebuilding? A Case Study of the Peace Process

that led to the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland.

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Abstract:

This paper will examine the negotiations in the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement, which brought about the end of the violent conflict in Northern Ireland and led to a new devolved settlement. Furthermore, it will highlight the importance of ensuring women and civil society have a voice in peace negotiations. To begin, I will analyse the pre-existing gender equality legislation in Northern Ireland. I will then seek to identify how women managed to earn a seat at the peace talks in Northern Ireland and the role they played during the negotiations. I will then analyse the extent to which women had an impact on the outcome of the Agreement and finally, I will identify potential lessons that parties to ongoing and future peace negotiations can learn from women’s involvement in Northern Ireland’s peace-building process. In order to obtain a better understanding of women’s perspective and role played in the Northern Irish conflict, I conducted an interview with Northern Irish academic and co-founder of the Northern Irish Women’s Coalition (NIWC), Monica McWilliams, which I have built much of my report around.

Key Words: Gender Equality, Peace, Northern Ireland, The Good Friday Agreement, The Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition

Introduction

It has been reported that, 'the world is entering its most dangerous chapter in decades. The sharp uptick in war over recent years is outstripping our ability to cope with the consequences.'¹ Ongoing conflicts are proving increasingly complex to solve due to rising extremism and hybrid forms of conflict, engaging varied actors and territories. To make matters worse, even when peace is attained, it is not sustainable: 50% of peace agreements fail within five years of signature.² This suggests that traditional methods of peacebuilding no longer suffice and therefore it is vital to identify ways in which the dynamics of peace talks can be altered in order to ensure that peace will be preserved after an agreement is reached.

Although women make up half of the world population, ensuring that they have a voice in peace negotiations has generally not been prioritised. To this day women remain grossly underrepresented in international peace talks: 'in the last two decades, women constituted a mere 4 percent of all signatories and less than 9 percent of negotiators in official peace processes.'³ This means that their potential to bring new perspective and leadership has not been fulfilled. However, the inclusion of women in peace and security efforts is being promoted somewhat by both international policymakers and feminists.

Considering the legislative framework of Northern Ireland, one could have expected the path to the negotiation table to be straightforward for women. Although until 1998, a woman's right to political inclusion was not formally recognised in Northern Ireland as such; it can be argued that other existing legislation amounted to the same protection, such as the fact that gender equality is recognised in the European Convention of Human Rights and women in Northern Ireland had

¹ Jean-Marie Guéhenno, "10 Conflicts To Watch In 2017", *Foreign Policy*, last modified 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/05/10-conflicts-to-watch-in-2017/>.

² *Donor Aid Strategies In Post-Peace Settlement Environments*, ebook (International Alert, 2006), http://international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/Donor_Aid_Strategies_in_Post_Peace_settlement_environments.pdf.

³ Melanne Verweir, "Where Women Are Leading The Peace", *GIWPS Blog*, last modified 2017, <http://blog.giwps.georgetown.edu/where-women-are-leading-the-peace/>.

the right to vote. Moreover, national and international legislation existed that promoted gender equality at that time. Gender equality legislation had already been adopted in Northern Ireland, namely, the Equal Pay Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 and the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976. Moreover, in 1982 the UN General Assembly's Declaration on the Participation of Women in Promoting International Peace and Cooperation and the convening of the Fourth World Conference on Women and participating governments issued the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This was followed by the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is the international human rights treaty that focuses specifically on equality between women and men in all areas of life and was ratified by the United Kingdom in 1986.

The need for equality in Northern Ireland was recognised long before the peace talks in the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement began. In 1990, Peter Brooke, the newly appointed Secretary of State, decided that equality and social need had to be incorporated into all policy making and so, 'he put out equality guidelines on gender and religious and political affiliation, to be applied to all policy-making'.⁴ Campbell, has reported that it was unexpected, 'that these policy initiatives would be drawn into the dynamism of parallel peace processes, and that their participants would alight upon seemingly dehydrated protocols and circulars to try to transform them into tools for change.'⁵ Furthermore, these guidelines were initially a gender initiative but turned out to be viewed as 'instruments of institutional change'⁶ by activists and academics involved in various movements in Northern Ireland. Two years after Peter Brooke was succeeded by Patrick Mayhew, the equality protocol, Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment (PAFT) was presented, 'which stipulated equality 'must condition and influence policy-making in all spheres and at all levels of government.' This protocol was introduced due to the stubbornness of its domestic support and international pressure. The equality movement was 'animated'⁷ by 'the opportunity to break out

⁴ Beatrix Campbell, *Agreement!* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2008). 38

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

of constitutional confinement'⁸ that the equality agenda presented and PAFT was brought to life by 'Unison members, feminist trade unionists, not republican or nationalist politics'⁹ and thus the importance of inclusive politics was clear years before it was made a reality in Northern Ireland.

UN Resolution 1325 was unanimously adopted in 2000. It was envisaged by the UN as a landmark document that would address the ways in which war impacts on women specifically and the significant role women should and do play in peacebuilding after conflict. This important issue has also been included in subsequent resolutions, 'including 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), and 1960 (2010), and in several reports of the Secretary-General on mediation and on women, peace and security.'¹⁰ However, today there is still a difference between the inclusion of men and women in formal peace negotiations which demonstrates that there is, 'a troubling gap between the aspirations of countless global and regional commitments and the reality of peace processes.'¹¹

The conflict in Northern Ireland, known as the Troubles refers to a violent thirty-year conflict, which took the lives of over 3,600 people and injured as many as 50,000 more.¹² The conflict dates back to before the 1920s; in 1916 the Easter Rising took place which was an armed rebellion launched by the Irish republicans to put an end to British rule in Ireland and establish an independent Irish republic. Furthermore, in 1920, the Government of Ireland Act¹³ partitioned Ireland into two distinct states: Northern Ireland, which remained part of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, which did not. After the implementation of this Act, there were two salient political identities; the Protestant unionists who wanted Northern Ireland to remain part

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Pablo Castillo Diaz and Simon Tordjman, *Women'S Participation In Peace Negotiations: Connections Between Presence And Influence*, ebook, 2nd ed. (UN Women, 2012), <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/03AWomenPeaceNeg.pdf>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² "BBC - History - The Troubles", Bbc.Co.Uk, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/troubles>.

¹³ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1920/67/pdfs/ukpga_19200067_en.pdf

of the United Kingdom and the Catholic nationalists who looked to reunify Ireland as an independent state. In 1967, the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was established in order to address the systematic inequalities and discrimination against Catholics with regards to social economic issues such as housing, employment and policing. The modern 'Troubles' began in the late 1960s when this initially peaceful civil rights movement was replaced with violent struggle, which lasted from 1970 until the late 1990s. The seemingly intractable conflict finally ceased after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement 1998, which set up Northern Ireland's devolved government, based at Stormont on the outskirts of Belfast.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, women were more active in community-based, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) rather than traditional political mechanisms. As reported by Anderson, 'from partition in 1921 to the start of the Troubles in 1969 – only three women in Northern Ireland had been elected to Westminster as MPs. In the Northern Ireland Assembly of Stormont, only nine women had ever been elected.'¹⁴ Moreover, 'there were slightly higher levels of representation at the local level where women candidates increased from 8.5 to 14.1% and the percentage of women *elected* rose from 7.2 to 12% between 1977 and 1993.'¹⁵ The lack of female involvement in formal politics deeply contrasted with the prominence women had in community politics at the time. Indeed, when the civil rights movement eventually progressed in Northern Ireland, it presented many opportunities for women's participation and leadership. For example, the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association elected Betty Sinclair as its chairperson. Additionally, Bernadette Devlin from People's Democracy, was one of the most prominent figures of the civil rights movement. At 21 years old she defeated the Member of Parliament (MP) from the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and became the youngest person elected as an Independent to the British Parliament.

The notable absence of women in the formal political sphere in Northern Ireland became obvious

¹⁴ Miriam J. Anderson, *Windows Of Opportunity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

in the mid-1990s and it was doubtful if women would have a voice in the peace negotiations. The Opsahl Commission¹⁶ was established in May 1992. It was a thirteen-month initiative lead by Professor Torkel Opsahl, a Norwegian lawyer and internationally renowned human rights expert. He was interested in the conflict in Northern Ireland due to the role he had previously taken on in the Irish government's case against Britain for the ill treatment of internees in 1971.¹⁷ It is important to note that the Commission was completely separate from the government and state authorities but it 'provided the first significant opportunity for women to express publicly their frustration at their relative exclusion from formal politics'.¹⁸ The issue was raised that Northern Ireland's political process did not make it easy for women to get involved nor did it allow the representation of women's interests. Therefore, the formal political sphere was a place that isolated and disempowered women; their views and leadership were neither present nor encouraged. Brown observed: 'In the period following the Opsahl Commission, momentum built up around the issue of women's political under-representation through a range of meetings, rallies and the mobilisation of women's organisations around the theme.'¹⁹

In 1996, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), a cross-community women's party, was created with the aim of giving civil society and women a voice in the peace negotiations, which began on June 10th 1996, led by former U.S. Senator George Mitchell. Moreover, the Women's Coalition was formed with the hope of increasing women's participation in Northern Irish politics. The founding members of the party, 'felt it necessary to take the gigantic step from the non-governmental sector to the political arena because they believed that the incumbent political leaders either ignored or refused to take seriously the issue of women's representation and

¹⁶ Henceforth, the 'Commission'

¹⁷ Marianne Elliott, "The Role Of Civil Society In Conflict Resolution: The Opsahl Commission In Northern Ireland, 1992-93", *New Hibernia Review* 17, no. 2 (2013): 86-102.

¹⁸ A. Brown, "Women And Constitutional Change In Scotland And Northern Ireland", *Parliamentary Affairs* 55, no. 1 (2002): 76-77.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

participation in the peace negotiations.²⁰ Unlike previous attempts at bringing about peace in Northern Ireland, the process in the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement, 'began... based, for the first time, on the assumption that: 'if you are part of the problem, then you need to be part of the solution.'²¹ Representatives to the talks were to be chosen through public elections with the intent of including the parties associated with parliamentary groups in formal political negotiations, which previously had not been the case.

The key difference between the peace negotiations in the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement and previous unsuccessful negotiations is that the Irish Government was present at the table along with the British Government and it was recognised as an equal partner in the process. Previous rounds of peace talks which had taken place in Northern Ireland had not been inclusive; Sinn Féin and loyalist paramilitaries had not been involved. The Alliance Party alongside the Unionist parties and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) had been the only parties invited to previous talks. Moreover, Senator Mitchell, nominated by President Clinton from the United States, the Prime Minister of Finland, Mr Holkeri and the Governor General from Canada, John de Chastelain were involved along with their officials. Interaction with Senator Mitchell, his chief of staff Martha Pope and the head of the Decommissioning of Weapons body, General John de Chastelain, would have been a new experience for some of those involved in the peace talks. Beatrix Campbell claims, this was the case 'for delegations closest to combatants and closest, therefore to what was deemed low life'²², as they would not have previously had a, 'sustained, respectful encounter with the upper class.'²³ Moreover, McWilliams has asserted that there were numerous failed rounds of negotiations before the peace talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

²⁰ Kate Fearon, "Northern Ireland's Women's Coalition: Institutionalising A Political Voice And Ensuring Representation", *Accord*, no. 13 (2017): 78-81, http://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord%2013_16Northern%20Ireland%20women's%20coalition_2002_ENG.pdf.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Beatrix Campbell, *Agreement!* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2008). 74

²³ *Ibid.*

Women made up 10 percent of the negotiating teams (being one of the ten parties elected to the peace talks) as well as becoming one of eight party signatories to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This means that the negotiations which led to the Good Friday Agreement is one of the peace processes with the highest percentage of female participation recorded between 1992 and 2011.²⁴ The Good Friday Agreement brought an end to the Troubles in Northern Ireland and established a foundation for sustainable peace by setting out provisions which attempted to deal with issues that affected the daily life of civil society in order to start bringing together a society that had been deeply segregated for years - a task which had previously seemed impossible. The success of the Northern Irish peace process leads to the question of whether securing seats at the peace table for women could be the paradigm shift that is necessary in order to deal with the complexities of modern conflicts and ensure peace agreements are more sustainable.

²⁴ Kate Fearon, "Northern Ireland's Women's Coalition: Institutionalising A Political Voice And Ensuring Representation", *Accord*, no. 13 (2017): 78-81, http://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord%2013_16Northern%20Ireland%20women's%20coalition_2002_ENG.pdf.

CHAPTER I

How did the NIWC Obtain Seat at the Negotiating Table in Northern Ireland?

i. The Creation of the NIWC

A Political Voice for Women

The creation of the NIWC has been traced back to April 1996 when Avila Kilmurray, a former trade union official and former director of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, and Monica McWilliams discussed the forthcoming peace talks. Both women had long been active in the Women's Movement and were frustrated by the likelihood that women would not have a voice in the negotiations that would decide the future of their country. Molinari reports that: 'working with the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform - a group which had long been campaigning for women's equal civic and political rights- both women decided that pressure should be placed on the Northern Ireland Office to reserve a space in the election for a women's party',²⁵ an idea which was generally approved by women's groups and organisations.

The Women of the NIWC

It is important to state that 'the founders of the NIWC were already involved in various forms of advocacy, many for women's rights in particular. 'The NIWC, "did not come out of nowhere" but rather emerged through already-existing mobilising structures in civil society.'²⁶ Moreover, 'the NIWC was comprised primarily of "non-partisan, peace-brokering women...rather than partisans and combatants", which suggests that the NIWC was not "representative of all women [but

²⁵ Véronique Molinari, "Putting Women In The Picture : The Impact Of The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition On Northern Irish Politics", *Études irlandaises* 32, no. 1 (2007): 109-126.

²⁶ Miriam J Anderson, *Windows Of Opportunity: How Women Seize Peace Negotiations For Political Change*, ebook (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190239534.001.0001/acprof-9780190239534>.

rather] a particular type of woman.”²⁷ However, the NIWC did reflect the diversity of interests and identities that existed in Northern Ireland as its members came from varying backgrounds, urban and rural areas and included unionists and nationalists, as well as those who did not define themselves in either of these categories. The NIWC overcame national divisions by establishing a party focused on an inclusive process of cross-community dialogue and fostering cross-party politics in Northern Ireland. In order to include both nationalist and unionist women, the NIWC refused to take any definitive position before the talks on the constitutional question i.e. the decision as to whether or not Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom or become part of a United Ireland as they believed this should be the outcome of dialogue between the parties to the agreement. Instead, the NIWC promoted three core principles around which policy would be built: ‘inclusion, equality and human rights in every sphere of politics’.²⁸

ii. Entering the Formal Political Sphere

The Election System

McWilliams has said that, ‘a transitional space was opened up by the Republican and Loyalist ceasefires’,²⁹ which set the scene for the peace talks in 1996. Elections to determine who would take part in all-party negotiations were later announced. Fearon has reported that: ‘In an attempt to ensure that the elections would result in delegates from all the main communities, the government developed an electoral system that offered participation based on relatively few votes. The number of seats would be assigned through a two-track system. The eighteen territorial constituencies would each elect five representatives. Through a ‘top-up’ system, they would be joined by two representatives from each of the ten most successful parties across

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Véronique Molinari, "Putting Women In The Picture : The Impact Of The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition On Northern Irish Politics", *Études irlandaises* 32, no. 1 (2007): 109-126.

²⁹ Monica McWilliams, *Women At The Peace Table: The Gender Dynamics Of Peace Negotiations*, ebook (Global Justice Academy, n.d.), <http://www.globaljusticeacademy.ed.ac.uk/documents/SSRN-id2719156.pdf>.

Northern Ireland as a whole.³⁰ This was an inclusive system as it enabled one hundred and ten members to be elected to the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue³¹ in 1995. The Forum was a body set up in 1996 as part of the peace negotiations designed to include all of the delegates elected. It would meet once a week to deliberate on selected issues in an informal manner. Out of the 110 delegates, 15 were women, representing six out of the ten parties who won seats. However, not all those who were elected to the Forum could participate in the plenary peace talks, in which serious discussions took place on the peace agreement proposals. The larger parties selected three delegates to represent them, they were also permitted to rotate their delegates whilst the smaller parties were permitted to select two delegates without rotation. In the first year of the peace talks, the participating parties sitting alongside the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, sent no women to represent them.

Although this was an inclusive system, the Government had not carried out the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP)'s proposal of 'a gender-proofed party list system'.³² This was a system whereby each party would alternate women and men in equal proportions on their lists with funds being provided for non-party groups to be included in the talks³³. This would have benefitted community organisations and therefore would have been advantageous for women due to their active involvement in community politics. The Government did not choose an inclusive election system because they were particularly interested in ensuring women would be at the table; they chose it in order to ensure the inclusion of two smaller armed groups on the loyalist side would become involved in the peace negotiations for the first time. The system chosen meant that the parties who were elected to the Forum were entitled to select their negotiating team for the peace talks.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Henceforth, the 'Forum'

³² *Véronique Molinari, "Putting Women In The Picture : The Impact Of The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition On Northern Irish Politics", Études irlandaises 32, no. 1 (2007): 109-126.*

³³ *Ibid.*

Although the chosen system was not directed at female participation, women recognised the historic opportunity that it presented to close the division between female involvement in informal and formal politics. The peace process allowed members of the NIWC to move away from community politics, and enter the male-dominated formal political sphere. The NIWC was registered as a party and had six weeks to launch a campaign and less than three weeks to choose its candidates.

The NIWC's Strategy

The NIWC's strategy to gain seats at the peace talks was to organise women through all their various networks and contacts to gain the necessary number of votes. Other parties and the media initially dismissed the NIWC but it succeeded in gaining one percent of the vote and finished as the ninth most popular political party out of sixteen parties that had contested the election. It secured 7,731 votes³⁴ and therefore was elected to the Forum giving it the right to send two delegates to the all-party talks where its delegates would have the status of full participants. This was the first time a women's party had contested an election in the province and its success was heralded as a breakthrough in politics.

McWilliams and Sagar worked hard to try to find common ground among the members of the NIWC, which necessarily implied compromise due to the bi-communal nature of the Women's Coalition. Additionally, the NIWC, 'attracted public attention and curiosity as to how the gender issue could intersect with sectarian issues and talks about the constitution.'³⁵

iii. Impact of Women other than the NIWC

Would women have had a voice without the NIWC?

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Considering that it was the aforementioned election system that presented women with the opportunity to earn seats at the table, whether or not they would have been represented at the peace talks had a different system been chosen is questionable. A survey conducted in 1996 found that two thirds of women wanted to see more women in Parliament and they did not believe any party in Northern Ireland represented their interests.³⁶ We can deduce from this that if the NIWC had not directly represented women and civil society in the negotiations, they would not have had a political voice. McWilliams has said that the NIWC were not particularly interested in being part of the Legislative Assembly as they were never anxious to be active long term in politics. However, the Government was only going to include parties who were part of the Legislative Assembly in the peace process and thus, it was necessary for the NIWC to remain elected in order for their members to participate in the implementation process and be included in implementing the Agreement. The election of the Women's Coalition to the peace talks already fulfilled their aim; it was, 'the opportunity to give voice, to be seen and heard, to change the priorities of politics by changing the composition of the legislators.'³⁷

McWilliams and Pearl Sagar, were chosen by the founders of the Women's Coalition to be the two representatives in the Forum and multiparty peace talks. Aside from the NIWC, the only other party represented by a woman in the negotiations was Sinn Féin, who joined the Talks a year after they began. However, most of the interventions from Sinn Féin took place through their male delegates.³⁸ It would be expected that any delegate who was chosen represent their party at the peace table would have been willing to voice their party's beliefs. This would have been particularly important for female delegates as they were not only representing their political party but they were also there to directly represent the needs of women and civil society. Women involved in the peace negotiations were subjected to rude and demeaning comments

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Beatrix Campbell, *Agreement!* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2008). 65

³⁸ Monica McWilliams, "Monica McWilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

from a number of their male colleagues who either did not take them seriously or were attempting to discourage them from *intervening*. McWilliams has stressed that if women manage to get a seat at the peace table, they should be actively participating in the negotiations and not allow themselves to be intimidated by the prominent male political figures of major parties.³⁹

Furthermore, McWilliams has commented that had the election system included the previous list system, 'women would have maintained and sustained their positions.'⁴⁰ In her opinion there should also have been a separate validation committee and those who were party to the Agreement should have stayed in place to implement it. She observes that if the NIWC were not included in the new Legislative Assembly then the onus might have been on the other parties to select women for seats and to appoint women into the Cabinet and to the Executive. As the NIWC are no longer an active political party in Northern Ireland, it has been left up to the other parties to appoint female representatives. Following the election in March 2017, a record number of women are now Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly: 30% of members are women which is the same percentage of female representation in the House of Commons.⁴¹

Reaction to the NIWC

Although it could be expected that women involved in Northern Irish politics would be supportive of the NIWC in their aim of encouraging female participation and leadership in the formal political sphere, McWilliams has stated that some female delegates were initially not happy about the formation of the Women's Coalition. This is because they believed it was attracting too much attention, which was a distraction from their involvement in the negotiations. However, these female politicians later acknowledged the positive impact that the NIWC had on women's

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Monica McWilliams, "Monica McWilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

⁴¹ Siobhan Fenton, "Northern Ireland Election Results: Record Number Of Female MLAs Take Seats At Stormont", *Independent*, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/northern-ireland-election-results-female-mla-record-stormont-a7614891.html>.

participation in formal politics. One woman in particular from the SLDP had initially been unsupportive of the NIWC but was later appointed as a Minister in the First Assembly. She has admitted that she had not been nominated to represent her party in the negotiations until the NIWC came into the picture as her party was made to face the negative attention they were receiving for being a male-only delegation.

CHAPTER II

What Impact did the NIWC Have on the Peace Negotiations?

i. The NIWC at the Table

Intermediary Role

The Northern Irish conflict seemed intractable due to deep-rooted anger and hatred on both sides, which meant that it could not be assumed that the parties involved in the peace talks would be capable of making completely rational decisions. Moreover, the emotions of the delegates at the table may have affected on their willingness to compromise. Although the origins of the conflict were long past, both the nationalists and the unionists had beliefs that had been passed down through generations and reinforced through segregated education and religious institutions. These beliefs led to violence and countless hate crimes, which made it increasingly difficult for representatives of the parties to avoid allowing their emotions to have an impact on the manner in which they were negotiating.

Throughout the negotiations, the NIWC were trusted intermediaries due to their inclusiveness, their refusal to take a stance on the constitutional question that did not include the consent of the people, their close ties with civil society and the fact that the other political groups involved did not regard them as a threat. Jane Wilde, member of the NIWC, has said that throughout the peace talks, 'We [the NIWC] were an honest broker...because we were seen as people... who were hardly going to challenge the main blocs of politics in terms of voting, and who behaved well.'⁴²Moreover, Liz O'Donnell, former Irish Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs, has said that NIWC, 'they [the NIWC] were very much part of the consultative process,

⁴² Kate Fearon, *Women's Work* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1999).

particularly when officials needed a back channel to gauge positions of opposing parties.⁴³ This role was particularly important when ceasefires were breached and parties were excluded from the peace talks. For example, when Sinn Féin was barred from the negotiations following a ceasefire breach by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) – who believed that political violence was necessary in order to achieve their goal making Ireland an independent republic - the NIWC maintained relations with the party, reporting back on what was happening in Stormont. Diane Greer, member of the NIWC has stated, “We worked very hard at trying to keep people in, you know the people who might have had a hard time staying in,” ...in reference both to Sinn Féin and the UDP [Ulster Democratic Party], who were also at times excluded from the Talks due to the UFF’s [Ulster Freedom Fighters’] implication in three murders.⁴⁴

The NIWC was careful to ensure that both nationalist and unionist women were involved in the peace process at all times. As the membership was bi-communal, they provided guidance on approaches acceptable to either or both communities. In order for NIWC to put forward an issue to be included in the agenda, its members would have had to come to a consensus among themselves first. This helped them enormously, McWilliams explains: ‘We [the NIWC] used to write a lot of papers until we could get a position that everyone could agree on. I remember Senator Mitchell telling us that we were the only people giving him actual papers with viewpoints that were commanding cross-community consensus’.⁴⁵

ii. Enriching the Agenda

Mediation was not the only role the NIWC took on in the negotiations. The NIWC were able to broaden issues on the agenda to include those which were important to women and civil society. During the Troubles some women had completely different experiences to those of

⁴³ Patty Chang et al., *Women Leading Peace*, ebook (The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2015), <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/sites/giwps/files/Women%20Leading%20Peace.pdf>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Monica McWilliams, "Monica McWilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

men. Some men, 'were involved in paramilitary organisations, 'fighting for their country' while women worried about feeding their families [and] domestic violence was common'.⁴⁶ Women were living in a divided society and had their own perspective on what was causing the violence. The report, 'Talking about the "Troubles" and Planning for the Future',⁴⁷ published by the Women's Resource and Development Agency, aimed to give women the opportunity to, 'reflect and share their experiences of the Troubles'.⁴⁸ It provides an insight into what it was like to live and grow up in a segregated society. One account in the report is that of a woman who, 'identified the late '60s as the time that she was increasingly becoming aware of 'differences' in people in terms of religion'. She explains, "'[I was] told I had to be careful around certain people as they could be 'bad' to me. [I] Felt I had to keep to my own area in order to feel safer'".⁴⁹ Not only did the Women's Coalition bring political attention to women's interests in policy-making but McWilliams stated that there were a whole range of issues that the NIWC brought to the peace table which otherwise may have been overlooked. These issues not only include women's rights but also the needs of the rest of civil society, such as victim's rights; mixed housing; special initiatives for young people from areas particularly affected by the conflict; and the promotion of a culture of tolerance.

Moreover, it was the representatives from the Women's Coalition who argued for the provision of a Civic Forum to be included in the Good Friday Agreement. This would be a consultative body that would sit alongside the Legislative Assembly and advise on economic and cultural issues and institutionalise opportunities for broader public participation in politics. This was in accordance with the NIWC's belief that groups that would not normally have access to decision-making in the formal political sphere should have direct representation. Thus, the Civic Forum would be designed to, 'help to promote a new style of politics that was more inclusive and

⁴⁶ Beatrix Campbell, *Agreement!* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2008). 62

⁴⁷ The Women's Resource and Development Agency, *Talking About The Troubles And Planning For The Future*, n.d., <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/women/docs/mclaughlin08womenconflict.pdf>.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ The Women's Resource and Development Agency, *Talking About The Troubles And Planning For The Future*, n.d., <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/women/docs/mclaughlin08womenconflict.pdf>.

consultative—a “third way” form of politics that more fully utilized the wealth of policy expertise outside the political parties and civil service.⁵⁰ The Women’s Coalition also insisted on the insertion of the ‘right of women to full and equal political participation’ and the ‘advancement of women in public life’ into the Agreement.

ii. Engaging Civil Society

The Importance of an Inclusive Approach

It is clear that members of the NIWC utilised the skills they had learned from community politics throughout the peace negotiations. This was demonstrated as they went out into the communities every Saturday once a month to gather public opinion on different issues and to check which political positions would work and those that would not. McWilliams has said, ‘it was not just as if we were sitting as a small group of women inside the talks, we were absolutely determined that we had the ownership of our positions from outside.’⁵¹ Furthermore, ‘we had branches of the Women’s Coalition across the country so all the branches were doing their work and feeding it up to us from the bottom up, as well as what we were telling them from the top down, in terms of what was going on inside the talks.’⁵² She has said that the members of NIWC who were at the table would inform those who were not of the issues that were on the agenda. She compares the NIWC’s relationship with the communities to constantly ‘walking on a tightrope’.⁵³ This is because the NIWC had to be vigilant of the information they were relaying about what was happening in the talks as they were confidential, while at the same time they sought to, ‘gather up information from the communities in response to what was happening’⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ Monica McWilliams, *Women At The Peace Table: The Gender Dynamics Of Peace Negotiations*, ebook (Global Justice Academy, n.d.), <http://www.globaljusticeacademy.ed.ac.uk/documents/SSRN-id2719156.pdf>.

⁵¹ Monica McWilliams, "Monica McWilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

The parties involved in the negotiations which had the least problems implementing the Agreement were the parties that worked closely with their constituencies and the communities such as the NIWC. Parties that had not continually engaged with their constituencies had the most difficulty. For example, the constituencies of the UUP in particular were shocked when they saw the Agreement as they had not been kept informed about the content of the negotiations. This situation played out once more with the police reform, which came from the Patten Report.⁵⁵ Reform of the police force was necessary as, at the time of the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland's police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was more than 85 percent Protestant, despite the fact that Catholics comprised nearly 40 percent of the population.⁵⁶ The BBC has reported that:

'The report made 175 recommendations including:

- Renaming the force the Northern Ireland Police Service
- A new oath committing officers to uphold human rights
- Adopting a new cap badge and symbols free of association from either the British or Irish states
- Removing the Union Flag from police buildings

Cutting the force to 7,500 officers over 10 years while recruiting equal proportions - from each community [; and]

- A new police board which could hold the force to account. This alone represents a significant shift in the balance of power between a UK law enforcement agency and the people it serves.⁵⁷

When this report was made, Peter Smith, a lawyer, had offered to brief the UUP leadership on

⁵⁵ The Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland, *A New Beginning: Policing In Northern Ireland* (The Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland, 1999), <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/police/patten/patten99.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Patty Chang et al., *Women Leading Peace*, ebook (The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2015), <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/sites/giwps/files/Women%20Leading%20Peace.pdf>.

⁵⁷ "BBC NEWS | N Ireland | Q&A: The Patten Report", *News.Bbc.Co.Uk*. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/442864.stm.

its contents before publication but the offer was not taken up.⁵⁸Therefore, when the report was eventually published the Party's constituencies were, 'apoplectic because they thought it was the end of the police as they ever knew it'.⁵⁹

Moreover, the NIWC's engagement with civil society continued after the Good Friday Agreement was eventually concluded in April 1998. After 22 months of deliberation, the Agreement had to be endorsed by a public referendum in order to take effect. The NIWC had worked hard to support the civil society-led 'Yes' Campaign by speaking at public debates as well as discussions amongst their own members. The effort put into promoting the Agreement is clear from the election result as, in Northern Ireland, turnout was a record 81.10 percent and 71.12 percent voted in favour of the Agreement. Moreover, in the Republic 94.3 percent of voters were in favour,⁶⁰ which had, 'massive historical and political significance'.⁶¹ Although the NIWC alone cannot take full credit for the result of the vote, they were amongst the most active participants in the referendum campaign and played a huge role in promoting the Agreement working closely with civil society.

ii. The NIWC and the Agenda

Sectarianism and Gender Imbalances

The Good Friday Agreement established an Independent Commission on Policing. Compositional data illustrated that 8 percent of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), Northern Ireland's police

⁵⁸ Monica McWilliams, "Monica McWilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ "BBC - History - The Good Friday Agreement", Bbc.Co.Uk, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/events/good_friday_agreement.

⁶¹ Kate Fearon, "Northern Ireland's Women's Coalition: Institutionalising A Political Voice And Ensuring Representation", *Accord*, no. 13 (2017): 78-81, http://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord%2013_16Northern%20Ireland%20women's%20coalition_2002_ENG.pdf.

force from 1922 to 2001, identified as Catholic and 13 percent as female.⁶² Rouse further observed that, 'Female officers were over represented in the part-time reserve and underrepresented at senior levels. The Equal Opportunities Commission did advocate that a gender quota should be included, but this advice was disregarded. The Police Act 2000 which followed made provision for 50/50 Catholic/Protestant recruitment quotas, but committed only to a 'gender action plan'.⁶³

There was a deep contrast between the two approaches taken to address the religious and gender imbalances. The fact that Catholics were underrepresented in the police force was considered so politically important that immediate action was taken. This is demonstrated by the religious quotas that were introduced in order to ensure compositional change was implemented straight away. The NIWC had put pressure on the Forum to introduce a 50/50 gender balance in any new political structures in the Agreement in order to deal with gender inequality in Northern Ireland. However, this proposal was not legally or formally enacted. Thus, it is clear that this issue was not treated with the same urgency in spite of the United Kingdom's obligations under CEDAW. The Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which monitors the implementation of CEDAW, has also stated its concern regarding the failure to introduce, 'temporary special measures to address the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions in the public and private sectors as well as in political life.'⁶⁴

Women Working Together

The relationship-building work that earned delegates of the NIWC a reputation as intermediaries

⁶² Michelle Rouse, "GENDER EQUALITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND – IN URGENT NEED OF A 'FRESH START'", Blog, *WOMENAREBORING*, 2016, <https://womenareboring.wordpress.com/2016/06/02/gender-equality-in-northern-ireland-in-urgent-need-of-a-fresh-start/>.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Michelle Rouse, "GENDER EQUALITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND – IN URGENT NEED OF A 'FRESH START'", Blog, *WOMENAREBORING*, 2016, <https://womenareboring.wordpress.com/2016/06/02/gender-equality-in-northern-ireland-in-urgent-need-of-a-fresh-start/>.

was a key strategy in order to fulfill their goals throughout the peace talks. In the final days of the negotiations, the professional relationships that the Coalition had built throughout the process proved invaluable in ensuring that the Women's Coalition's priorities were included in the final draft of the Agreement. Inside the Castle Buildings, the office block in which the negotiations took place, the Women's Coalition office was situated on the ground floor and so everyone had to pass by it when they entered the building, 'and the women exploited that to maximise their influence.'⁶⁵

When the issue of victims and reconciliation had been completely left out of an earlier draft, the NIWC used their relation with Mo Mowlam, newly appointed Secretary of State, to re-insert the issue into the Agreement. They suggested an alternative proposal, which they briefed her on in the women's toilets because it was proving too difficult to put forward in an official meeting as her civil servants had become skeptical of the Women's Coalition having too much access to her on this issue. Chapter 5, Strand 3 of the final draft of the Agreement includes three paragraphs on the necessity to, 'acknowledge and address the needs of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation' and to ensure that the 'provision of services that are supportive and sensitive to the needs of victims' is a key element requiring resources.

Furthermore, the Women's Coalition, for a time, allowed women from other parties to have dual membership⁶⁶. This is important to consider when analysing the NIWC's impact on the peace talks and is something that McWilliams has said worked well for the NIWC. She has stated, 'in the early days we had members of other parties coming along to the Coalition meetings just to see what was happening and they were women who were critical of their own parties for not taking women more seriously'.⁶⁷ Moreover, allowing their members to have dual membership

⁶⁵ Beatrix Campbell, *Agreement!* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2008). 61

⁶⁶ Avila Kilmurray, *LESSONS FROM THE WOMEN'S COALITION IN NORTHERN IRELAND - Before, During And Following Peace Negotiations.*, ebook (Nobel Women's Initiative, 2010), <https://nobelwomensinitiative.org/session-i-peace-talks-and-outcomes-strategies-and-outcomes/>.

⁶⁷ Monica McWilliams, "Monica McWilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

demonstrates that the Women's Coalition was not hiding anything; the women were happy for other parties to see what they were doing. McWilliams has said, 'we were very open and very transparent in the way that we did our work',⁶⁸ which contrasts to the secretive way in which parties usually carry out their business. Furthermore, it has been reported that the NIWC, 'proactively reached out to women from different backgrounds and identities... [which] allowed for the fact that women can be rooted in identity but can still shift in learning and understanding. It also allowed for a membership that was strong on inclusion; cross-checking and cross-community validation and dialogue.'⁶⁹

For the NIWC, it was important to build relationships with members of other political parties as well as with other mediators involved in the negotiations. The NIWC were fortunate in the way that those who were appointed to Northern Ireland from the U.S. Council predominantly were women and were very sympathetic to what the NIWC was trying to do. McWilliams has observed that, 'they could see the enormous conservative patriarchist attitudes that we were up against so they were supportive.'⁷⁰ Moreover, Mo Mowlam, 'who already had been persuaded of the case for a *statutory* equality duty'⁷¹ also approved the insertion of the phrase 'the right of women to full and equal participation' into the Agreement, which was lobbied by the NIWC. Moreover, Liz O'Donnell was also very supportive of the Women's Coalition. McWilliams has expressed the importance of building a team of empathetic women out with the formal political sphere as well as those directly involved in the peace negotiations. She has said that sometimes those women would be part of the technical expert group. She mentions one woman in particular, who was the most senior member of Senator Mitchell's staff, 'who has never been recognised' yet was 'incredibly supportive in as much as she could be because she could not be seen to be partisan'.⁷²

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Avila Kilmurray, *LESSONS FROM THE WOMEN'S COALITION IN NORTHERN IRELAND - Before, During And Following Peace Negotiations.*, ebook (Nobel Women's Initiative, 2010), <https://nobelwomensinitiative.org/session-i-peace-talks-and-outcomes-strategies-and-outcomes/>.

⁷⁰ Monica McWilliams, "Monica McWilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

⁷¹ Beatrix Campbell, *Agreement!* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2008). 58

⁷² Monica McWilliams, "Monica McWilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

As well as women champions, McWilliams has emphasised that men need to stand up for equality issues as well as women. She has stated that there were men at the negotiating table who supported the NIWC but did not defend their positions strongly enough. For example, she says that behind the scenes, one of the chairpersons of the peace talks, a former Prime Minister of Finland, expressed his view that the way in which the delegates of the NIWC were treated at the table was appalling. However, David Ervine, the leader of the Progressive Unionist Party and a previous combatant was someone who did challenge the way in which the women were treated. McWilliams has acknowledged that, 'it can't just be left up to the women themselves to fight this cause and that builds credibility and validity.'⁷³

⁷³ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER III

Section 3: What Impact did women have on the Outcome of the Agreement?

i. Proposals in the Final Draft of the Agreement

The Civic Forum

The NIWC's success in pursuing their agenda is evident as proposals which they had put forward during the negotiations were included in the final draft of the Agreement. The Women's Coalition secured support for the Civic Forum, an idea, which they initiated and had persistently fought for throughout the peace talks. This was an issue that the NIWC had anticipated would be challenging to work into the final draft of the Agreement as it was an idea that provoked controversy,⁷⁴ however it proved easier than they imagined to work into the Agreement and it was incorporated as part of Strand One, Democratic Institutions in Northern Ireland. The Agreement states that the Civic Forum, 'will act as a consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues'⁷⁵.

The Human Rights Section

Another aspect of the Agreement on which the NIWC has attained recognition is the human rights section. The NIWC decided that after being included in the peace process for two years it was important for them to have women's rights formally recognised. As regards gender issues, the NIWC can take credit for having the right of women to full and equal participation in the political life of the province included in the Good Friday Agreement through two specific references: the first, in the section 'Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity', where the parties 'affirm their commitment to the mutual respect, the civil rights and the religious liberties of everyone in

⁷⁴ Monica McWilliams, "Balancing Act", *Bbc.Co.Uk*, last modified 1999, http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/schools/agreement/governance/support/gov3_c061.shtml.

⁷⁵ The Belfast Agreement 1998.

the community'⁷⁶ and in particular to 'the right of women to full and equal political participation'⁷⁷; the second one in the section on 'Economic, Social and Cultural Issues' where the parties pledge themselves to promote 'the advancement of women in public life'.⁷⁸

Moreover, the Women's Coalition can take some credit for the equality provisions that were included in the final draft of the Agreement. The importance of dealing with the issue of equality in Northern Ireland was due to decades of work by Unison and the Trade Union Movement. Unison, one of the biggest trade unions in Northern Ireland had previously promoted the utility of PAFT to both protestant and catholic communities. Furthermore, Unison later joined up with the Committee on the Administration of Justice in attempt to popularise PAFT and ensured 'the equality agenda was acquiring critical mass in the trade union movement; equality and social justice was bridging the community divide; and human rights activism was acquiring a socio-economic discourse.'⁷⁹ John Morrison and Stephen Livingstone reckoned that 'PAFT, and the movements around it' were, 'set to be *the* significant idea which would underpin post-ceasefire policy'.⁸⁰ It is clear that there were a lot of people working towards achieving equality in Northern Ireland and it was the need for the equality agenda which united the unionist and nationalist members of the Women's Coalition and pushed them to play the final role of putting gender equality on the table and ensuring it was included in the final draft of the Agreement.

The Equality Commission

Additionally, the Northern Ireland Act 1998 established the Equality Commission, which was to be formed by combining Northern Ireland's four equality agencies: the Commission for Racial Equality NI, the Equal Opportunities Commission NI, the Fair Employment Commission and the

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Beatrix Campbell, *Agreement!* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2008). 53

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

NI Disability Council. The NIWC expressed in their Manifesto for Assembly Elections their concern that the establishment of an Equality Commission could potentially 'create a hierarchy of discrimination.'⁸¹ They stated that, 'the government White Paper, whilst focusing on the serious issue of differentials in Catholic and Protestant employment, must also include a strong commitment to gender equality'⁸² and pledged to, 'demand stringent safeguards to ensure that the work of other equality commissions are not subsumed by the prominence of the employment issue.'⁸³ The Equality Commission provides protection against discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, race, religion and political opinion, sex and sexual orientation. Moreover, it has responsibilities arising from the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in respect of the statutory equality and good relations duties which apply to public authorities. The Equality Commission can challenge discrimination; it can help people take cases, it advises employers and service providers on how to comply with the law and have good practice, and it talks to government and policy makers to ensure policies and practices at government level are fair.

ii. Gaps in the Implementation Phase

The Northern Ireland Act 1998

The Good Friday Agreement was set to bring about more than peace; it promised, 'to begin the millennial work of transforming the sectarian and sexist power relations that structured their [the negotiators'] society'.⁸⁴ Although the Agreement's proposals regarding equality, are generally considered an achievement of the Women's Coalition and they have had some documented impact, so far, they have not brought about gender equality in Northern Ireland due to gaps in the implementation phase. This demonstrates that the mere inclusion of gender proposals in the

⁸¹ The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, *Northern Ireland Assembly Election Manifesto - A New Voice For New Times* (The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, 1998).

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Beatrix Campbell, *Agreement!* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2008). 71

Agreement was not enough. Rather, in order to be effective they should have been safeguarded in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the constitutional document which was enacted in order to put the Good Friday Agreement into legal effect. The right of women to full and equal participation, which was included in the Agreement, turned out to solely be an aspiration rather than a guarantee because the section of the Agreement was not thereafter written into the Act.

McWilliams has noted that the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act were in place before UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and although the NIWC would have been looking to cement the proposals through quotas, at the time the issue of quotas was anathema to the parties. The only quota that was implemented was the religious quota introduced for the police force which was implemented at a later stage and did ultimately increase the number of women who entered into the police force. She states, 'there were never any guarantees given to gender and looking back, we should have fought harder to make sure that what we were proposing would get implemented.'⁸⁵ On the one hand, this is an error that parties to future peace negotiations can learn from as it emphasises the necessity of safeguarding agreed proposals. On the other hand, it is an issue that, nevertheless, does highlight the importance of involving women in peace negotiations as it was due to 'the combined pressure of the Women's Coalition, Sinn Fein and the loyalist PUP and UDP'⁸⁶ in the last 36 hours of negotiations that there was more than one sentence on equality in the final draft of the Agreement. Fionnuala Ní Áolain, an Irish academic lawyer specialising in human rights law, believes that although ensuring women have a voice in peace talks, "may not fundamentally reshape women's engagement in transitional justice processes or shape outcomes [...] it remains a necessary first step to forward-looking transformation for women".⁸⁷

⁸⁵ The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, *Northern Ireland Assembly Election Manifesto - A New Voice For New Times* (The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, 1998).

⁸⁶ Beatrix Campbell, *Agreement!* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2008). 67

⁸⁷ F. Ni Aolain, "Advancing Feminist Positioning In The Field Of Transitional Justice", *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, no. 2 (2012): 205-228.

The fact that the gender equality provisions did not fulfill their purpose is deeply regretted by members of the NIWC. Kilmurray and McWilliams have stated that, in hindsight, it was a mistake to prioritise 'big picture' ideas like participatory democracy in form of the Civic Forum over more technical mechanisms of electoral reform to secure women's political representation. Reflecting on this, McWilliams acknowledges that this was a gap in the implementation phase and that it, 'could have been turned into a proposal with a timetable and a deadline but it was not; it was left free- standing amongst a set of rights.'⁸⁸

A Written Constitution

This leads to the question of whether or not the reason why these gaps exist is solely due to the fact that they were not included in the legally binding Act or if other factors contributed to their failure to fulfil their purpose such as the fact that the United Kingdom does not have a written constitution. Ultimately, peace agreements and constitutions do not have the same purpose, 'peace treaties reflect the immediate changes and compromises necessary to end violent conflict, while constitutions codify an existing consensus on national identity and values and on how society wishes to be governed, anticipating future threats to peaceful relations.'⁸⁹ Furthermore, 'a peace-treaty may adopt measures that radically change the government and politics in a conflict zone, while traditionally constitutions create stability by protecting against such changes.'⁹⁰ However, drafting of constitutions has become a common peacemaking tool in conflict resolution, it has been used in Iran, Afghanistan, and Nepal and has been met with various degrees of success. The United Kingdom, is one of three countries that does not have a written constitution, and so gender dimensions of the Agreement could not be embedded in any central constitution. However, the Northern Ireland Act is, in a sense, regarded as a post-conflict

⁸⁸ Monica McWilliams, "Monica McWilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

⁸⁹ Hallie Ludsin, PEACEMAKING AND CONSTITUTION-DRAFTING: A DYSFUNCTIONAL MARRIAGE, ebook (y Penn Law: Legal Scholarship Repository, 2011), <http://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1056&context=jil>.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

constitution as it is a legally binding document that was signed in order to put the constitutional arrangements - as agreed in the peace negotiations - into legal form. Moreover, it operates, in essence, almost as a written constitution for Northern Ireland as reported in the case of *Robinson v Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Others (Northern Ireland)*.⁹¹ The case states that:

‘The 1998 Act does not set out all the constitutional provisions applicable to Northern Ireland, but it is in effect a constitution. So to categorise the Act is not to relieve the courts of their duty to interpret the constitutional provisions in issue. But the provisions should, consistently with the language used, be interpreted generously and purposively, bearing in mind the values which the constitutional provisions are intended to embody.’⁹²

Therefore, there were no technical legal obstacles to entrenching gender equality at the level of Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, the Northern Ireland Act involved a settlement between the parties in Northern Ireland as well as a bilateral international treaty between Ireland and the United Kingdom. The terms of the bilateral treaty between Ireland and the United Kingdom are covered by customary international law and the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT). Indeed, as, ‘...both Governments sought to have their bilateral agreement indexed with the UN Treaty Series demonstrates the intended ‘international’ character of the Treaty and its binding nature under international law.’⁹³ Therefore, as previously stated, in the same way that a constitution is legally binding, all of the political parties who were party to the Northern Ireland Act - the United Kingdom and Irish Governments - are legally bound.

⁹¹ *Robinson V Secretary Of State For Northern Ireland And Others (Northern Ireland)* HL 25 Jul 2002 (House of Lords 2002).

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ BTC Warwick, CRG Murray and A O'Donoghue, *Policy Paper: The Place Of Northern Ireland Within UK Human Rights Reform*, ebook (Newcastle University ePrints, 2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2643464>.

Furthermore, it is not unusual for a peace agreement to include a broader range of issues than the legally binding document or constitution. Therefore, even if a new written constitution was drafted for the United Kingdom after the Troubles in order to legally safeguard the Good Friday Agreement, it could have left the same provisions out as the Northern Ireland Act. This would suggest that the gap in the implementation phase of the gender provisions cannot be solely due to the fact that the United Kingdom does not have a written constitution.

No Bill of Rights

Peace agreements that are concluded in countries which have a written constitution are usually followed up by amendments to the Bill of Rights. The Human Rights Commission in Northern Ireland submitted a draft Bill of Rights nearly 10 years ago⁹⁴. This draft is being referred to as, 'an unimplemented element of earlier Agreements.'⁹⁵ The Bill of Rights would be drafted and enacted either as part of the Good Friday Agreement or as a separate document and then enacted by either by Northern Irish Assembly Legislation or by the Parliament of the United Kingdom. As Monica McWilliams was Chief Commissioner at the time the Bill was drafted, it would be suspected that the Bill of Rights would seek to fulfil the aims of the gender equality provisions that were included in the final draft of the Good Friday Agreement. The Human Rights Commission intends that the Bill of Rights will, 'supplement the Act rather than repeal and replace it.'⁹⁶ Indeed, the drafted Bill includes a number of supplementary rights, namely: 'equality and non-discrimination; democratic rights; identity and culture; victims' rights; socio-economic rights; environmental rights; and children's rights'⁹⁷. Furthermore, 'The Commission took the

⁹⁴ Anne Smith and Colin Harvey, "Continuing The Conversation About A Bill Of Rights For Northern Ireland", Blog, *UK Constitutional Law Blog*, 2017, <https://ukconstitutionallaw.org/2017/07/21/anne-smith-and-colin-harvey-continuing-the-conversation-about-a-bill-of-rights-for-northern-ireland/>.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Anne Smith and Colin Harvey, "Continuing The Conversation About A Bill Of Rights For Northern Ireland", Blog, *UK Constitutional Law Blog*, 2017, <https://ukconstitutionallaw.org/2017/07/21/anne-smith-and-colin-harvey-continuing-the-conversation-about-a-bill-of-rights-for-northern-ireland/>.

position that all these rights are capable of judicial enforcement...[it] adopted a number of innovative recommendations, including annual reporting to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Westminster Parliament on progress as well as the establishment of a Human Rights Committee in the Assembly and a five-year independent review. The Commission also recommended that the Bill would apply to both the Assembly and the Executive and have vertical as well as horizontal application.⁹⁸

The content of the proposed Northern Ireland Bill of Rights was met with a largely dismissive approach by the Northern Ireland Office; it has remained on their desks since it was drafted in 2009.⁹⁹ Despite that, 'there have been attempts to revive this project it is now largely stalled'¹⁰⁰ due to the Conservative government adopting a stance against the European Convention on Human Rights and by default against a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, which now puts that part of the Good Friday Agreement at risk.¹⁰¹ However, the Irish government and the two nationalist parties, Sinn Féin and SDLP continue to place the Bill of Rights on the agenda of the current round of negotiations to resolve the current deadlock between the parties.¹⁰² Indeed, 'It is a conversation that should and needs to continue to safeguard against the weakening of human rights standards post-Brexit. Northern Ireland, as well as parties to ongoing and future peace negotiations, should consider that when parties at the peace table have contrasting views on various issues, the agreed provisions need to be legally safeguarded in a way in which ensures that they will fulfil their purpose.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Monica McWilliams, "Monica McWilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Anne Smith and Colin Harvey, "Continuing The Conversation About A Bill Of Rights For Northern Ireland", Blog, *UK Constitutional Law Blog*, 2017, <https://ukconstitutionallaw.org/2017/07/21/anne-smith-and-colin-harvey-continuing-the-conversation-about-a-bill-of-rights-for-northern-ireland/>.

¹⁰¹ Monica McWilliams, "Monica McWilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Political Will

Political will to carry out the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement, included in the Act or not, seems to be more important than having the provisions written in a formal, legally binding document. Indeed, in a post conflict scenario, the most important thing is that the undertakings that are agreed – in whatever form- should be implemented faithfully to both the letter and the spirit of the agreement. For example, in Guatemala an inclusive peace process led to the signing of an agreement in 1996. Despite that the negotiations, ‘resulted in comprehensive rights for women and a range of state institutions and policies to promote gender equality...there has been no real shift in exclusionary power relations in Guatemala and these new gender equality structures are politically sidelined and under resourced.’¹⁰³ Thus, it seems that in order for ‘new formal “rules of the game”’¹⁰⁴ to be effective, there must be ‘longer term efforts to transform power relations’¹⁰⁵ as well as ‘donor support for formal change.’¹⁰⁶

Moreover, Gerhart et al have commented that, ‘even an efficient contract will not necessarily survive in the absence of an enforcement mechanism. Individuals have incentives to break rules after the rules have come into effect. This is true even of those individuals who agreed to the rules in the first place.’¹⁰⁷ In addition, ‘Post-contractual opportunism is especially problematic in the case of political constitutions, which lack effective third-party enforcement.’¹⁰⁸ Even with a written constitution, the implementation phase could still fail in the absence of political will and third party champions.

¹⁰³ Clare Castillejo, *Building A State That Works For Women: Integrating Gender Into Post-Conflict State Building*, ebook (Madrid: FRIDE, 2011), http://fride.org/download/WP107_Building_state.pdf.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Gail M. Gerhart, Anton D. Lowenberg and William H. Kaempfer, "The Origins And Demise Of South African Apartheid: A Public Choice Analysis", *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 4 (1999): 249.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER IV

What can be learned from the Northern Ireland Case?

i. Lessons for Parties to Ongoing and Future Peace Talks

An Inclusive Election System

The success of the negotiation process in Northern Ireland in reaching an agreement suggests that parties to ongoing and future peace negotiations should take into account the positive impact an open election system can have on bringing about sustainable peace. It is important that governments which are attempting to bring about peace in the future choose an electoral system which will achieve inclusivity and that they do not allow the old status quo to return by disregarding gender equality issues. McWilliams opines that the list system, which was used for the elections to the peace talks in Northern Ireland, 'was good for two reasons: firstly, individuals are very frightened in conflict in case they are personally attacked and secondly, women prefer to work as a team rather than have one individual or two or three elected representatives'.¹⁰⁹

As members of the NIWC were able to earn seats at the table in the peace negotiations in Northern Ireland due to the specific circumstances of the election process, the question that arises is whether or not women who are involved ongoing conflict would be able to follow the same strategy as the NIWC in order to be included in formal peace talks. McWilliams believes that the list system can and should be used by parties to ongoing and future peace negotiations because it would allow women and other civil society groups who are involved in community politics the chance to enter into the formal political arena.

Furthermore, McWilliams has been involved in a number peace processes - most recently with Colombia and Syria for the past 5 years. She says that she has been advising Syrian women

¹⁰⁹ Monica McWilliams, "Monica Mcwilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

delegates - where a plethora of conflict has raged since 2011 – to make their election system as pluralist as possible and thus take account of the diversity that makes up the country and to pay particular attention to the issue of gender. She states that peace benefits from having a range of voices from a diverse number of groups participating in the process and then implementing the outcome.¹¹⁰ Moreover, she has said that in both Colombia and Syria, she has placed great importance on making certain that women, ‘have seats at the table as well as in any parallel process through the women’s advisory group or a civil society advisory group in the case of Syria.’¹¹¹ The women involved in the Gender Commission in Colombia have expressed that the NIWC encouraged them to establish a gender sub-committee to the peace talks on Colombia, which was critical to their peace agreement.

Inclusivity leads to Sustainability

The Northern Irish peace process indicates that women are particularly effective in dealing with a diverse range of issues that may not be deemed crucial in the short-term. That does not mean to say that they should not also be contributing on the traditional core issues too; with the exclusion of women and civil society in negotiations, more than half the population is almost entirely unrepresented at the peace table. Furthermore, ‘if civil society actors are included in the peace deal, the risk of peace failing regarding the signatories is reduced by 64%, whereas the corresponding figure for the overall peace is 50%. Thus, the inclusion of civil society actors does seem to matter for the durability of peace concerning both dimensions of peace.’¹¹² Moreover, an inclusive peace process reduces the likelihood that excluded parties will act out against the process and generates greater trust as women and civil society can appeal to their communities for support. The significance of this is stressed by Campbell, who has stated that, ‘the presence of parties close to combatants, which also included former prisoners, was vital to its [the

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² Klara Backman, "Investing In Activism And Harnessing Expertise" (Masters, Lund University, 2017).

Agreements] durability. They had helped finesse the text, they felt it was theirs.’¹¹³

ii. A Different Perspective

Women Broaden the Agenda

In Northern Ireland, the constitutional issue was seen as the most important issue to resolve in order to bring about peace in Northern Ireland. Equally, in ongoing conflicts there are issues that are seen as the central issues that must be dealt with in order to bring about peace - especially in armed conflicts where the first step would be to end the violence. However, as was the case in Northern Ireland, there are also many deeper issues that need to be addressed in ongoing and future peace talks if peace and security is to be lasting. For example, in the case of Northern Ireland, fundamental issues, such as education, economic opportunity, and security that affected women’s everyday lives were brought to the table by the NIWC as they recognised the importance of addressing them in order to avoid the relapse of conflict after an agreement was reached. Although every conflict is different, there are similarities in each situation. Desmond Tutu, social rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize awardee has stated that, ‘each society must discover its own route to reconciliation. Reconciliation cannot be imposed from outside, nor can someone else’s map get us to our destination: it must be our own solution.’¹¹⁴ Parties involved in ongoing and future peace talks should involve women and civil society in the negotiations in order to ensure that fundamental issues that affect day-to-day life are brought to the table. The NIWC demonstrated the ability and drive that women have to do so by insisting that victims’ rights were included in the Agreement.

Moreover, John Paul Lederach, Professor of International Peacebuilding, argues that it can take

¹¹³ Beatrix Campbell, *Agreement!* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2008). 63

¹¹⁴ Tendaiwo Peter Maregere, "Africafiles | Reconciliation, Truth And Justice: Confronting The Dilemmas", *Africafiles.Org*, last modified 2009, <http://www.accord.org.za>.

a society the same amount of years to come out of conflict as the duration of the conflict itself,¹¹⁵ thus reinforcing the idea that issues which affect civil society must be incorporated into the agenda. This idea can be applied to conflicts that are ongoing today; for example, in previous, unsuccessful attempts to put an end to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, the issue of water rights has not been prioritised and it has proved tricky to resolve due to the political atmosphere in the middle-east. The issue of water rights impacts on the day-to-day life of civil society and therefore it must be addressed in order to reduce the likelihood of conflict relapsing after a peace agreement is reached. Despite the importance of the issue, water rights, 'were set aside to be dealt with in the "final status" Israel-Palestinian talks, which were never concluded.'¹¹⁶

The peace process in the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement has shown that women have frequently broadened the set of issues on the agenda to address development and human rights as well as security. So far, very few women have managed to officially involve themselves in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. A more inclusive process would increase the likelihood that issues which are not necessarily deemed central to the conflict but are important in order to ensure sustainable peace, of being discussed in the negotiations rather than being set aside. Additionally, 'reports reveal that when women are included in peace processes there is a 20 percent increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least 2 years, and a 35 percent increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least 15 years'¹¹⁷

Furthermore, parties to ongoing and future peace talks should consider that including women at the peace table can enrich the agenda. The aforementioned report, 'Talking about the "Troubles" and Planning for the Future', emphasises the fact that women and men have different

¹¹⁵ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation In Divided Societies* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute for Peace Press, 1997).

¹¹⁶ Martin Asser, "Obstacles To Arab-Israeli Peace: Water - BBC News", *BBC News*, last modified 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11101797>.

¹¹⁷ "'It Takes A Woman" To Build Peace In Syria", *UN Women | Arab States/North Africa*, last modified 2017, accessed July 16, 2017, <http://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/4/news-it-takes-a-woman-to-build-peace-in-syria>.

experiences during times of conflict and this was evident throughout the Troubles. Moreover, the ongoing conflict in Syria demonstrates that there are certain things that happen to women in conflict that do not happen to men, not just in relation to the detention or the victimisation of women but regarding the fact that Syrian women have no constitutional right to pass their nationality onto their children; only men can do that in Syria under its current constitution.¹¹⁸ As many Syrian women are now widows, the question of whether or not mothers can pass on Syrian citizenship to their children needs to be addressed in any future peace negotiations. Although this is an issue that is specific to the Syrian conflict, it is a lesson that is applicable to all ongoing and future peace processes in the sense that it demonstrates that there are some issues that exist in times of conflict which men might not necessarily think to include in the agenda. Moreover, parties to current and future peace negotiations can learn from , ‘the legacy of the [Northern Irish] conflict’¹¹⁹, that is, ensuring to keep the testimony and keep the evidence of what is happening before the formal peace processes eventually start.

ii. Women are Successful Intermediaries

Bringing Parties Together

The NIWC’s role of ‘honest broker’ throughout the Northern Irish peace negotiations demonstrates that women can help to ease tensions at the peace table. This is because, ‘when the mediators are fighting among themselves, they aren’t necessarily thinking of the people who have to live with the consequences.’¹²⁰ Although every conflict is different, in those in which negative feelings have been firmly embedded in the thoughts of the parties and they not only disagree on how to solve the conflict between them - but they disagree on the problem itself -

¹¹⁸ Somini Sengupta and Hwaida Saad, "As Refugees Flee, Thousands Of Children Have No Country To Call Their Own", *Nytimes.Com*, last modified 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/06/world/europe/as-refugees-flee-thousands-of-children-have-no-country-to-call-their-own.html?mcubz=3>.

¹¹⁹ Monica McWilliams, "Monica Mcwilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

¹²⁰ "Pedersen: Women Mediators Can Produce More Lasting Peace", *IPI - International Peace Institute*, last modified 2015, <https://www.ipinst.org/2015/10/tools-for-inclusive-mediation#8>.

the necessity for a mediator is even greater. Bell asserts that the lack of solidarity among parties and the power dynamics at the time of the Good Friday Agreement, 'meant that there was insufficient consensus over the need for, and role of, any transitional justice mechanism and instead discrete issues were provided for relating to prisoner release, and victim's rights, in a piecemeal way, rather than any holistic transitional justice mechanism.'¹²¹ This is where women could have an invaluable contribution in ongoing and future peace processes. From their intermediary role in the peace negotiations in Northern Ireland, it is clear that they could have a significant impact in alleviating tension between the parties and helping to integrate civil society. This also follows from their work on a community level as they facilitated between Protestant unionists and Catholic nationalists by bringing together key members of each community to calm tensions.

Moreover, several members of the NIWC have highlighted the inclusion of integrated education as one of the NIWC's greatest achievements. The Good Friday Agreement states that: 'an essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing.'¹²²

iii. Women Overcome Obstacles

Women Can Come to a Consensus

It is important to note the fact that the Women's Coalition included women from both sides of the conflict. Parties to ongoing and future peace negotiations should include women in their peace processes as, as the representatives from the NIWC demonstrated, women are able to

¹²¹ Christine Bell, *Transitional Justice And Political Settlements*, ebook (The University of Edinburgh, 2015), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2546423.

¹²² The Belfast Agreement.

compromise and reach a consensus which conflicting parties are satisfied with. This is also demonstrated today by the representatives of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, a body that Gambale describes as consisting, 'of 12 Syrian women who meet with de Mistura separately from the official government and opposition delegation.'¹²³ It must be considered that, 'the Advisory Board does not directly participate in the negotiations... instead, it is an attempt to bring women from all sides of the conflict together in order to promote a stronger gender perspective to the talks but in some ways to also prove that people from very different political backgrounds can sit at the same table together.'¹²⁴ So far the Syrian Women's Advisory Board have attempted to build consensus on many issues that remain unsolved for the negotiating delegations, such as the issue of prisoners and the kidnapped. The fact that the Syrian Women's Advisory Board is able to deal with issues more quickly than those included in the formal peace talks, suggests that an inclusive process would be a step forward in bringing about peace.

Moreover, the fact that the Syrian Women's Advisory Board is led by the United Nations, highlights the necessity for champions for peace and equality among men and women. This is something that McWilliams has emphasised: 'you need champions and sometimes they come from outside the country in the form of ambassadors or special envoys and they need to be lobbied to ensure they understand the importance of women's involvement.'¹²⁵ McWilliams acknowledges that this is something that parties to ongoing peace negotiations are learning from the Northern Irish peace process, she gives the example of the negotiations taking place in Syria where she says, 'the Canadian Ambassador is really helpful to the women involved in the Geneva talks as are a number of other women ambassadors based in Geneva.'¹²⁶

¹²³ Maria Gambale, "How Syrian Women Landed At The UN Peace Talks And What It All Means | Passblue", *Passblue.Com*, last modified 2016, <http://www.passblue.com/2016/05/10/how-syrian-women-landed-at-the-un-peace-talks-and-what-it-all-means/>.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Monica McWilliams, "Monica McWilliams Interview", Phone Interview by Nikki Taylor, 2017.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The peace process in the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement demonstrates that an inclusive peace process can greatly enrich the content of a peace agreement and increase the likelihood that peace, if attained, will be sustainable. From the negotiations that took place in Northern Ireland, it is clear that ensuring women and civil society have a political voice can ensure that the agenda will include issues that are key in order to obtain support in favour of the agreement and increase the chance that peace will be maintained if an agreement is reached.

As demonstrated by members of the NIWC, women are effective mediators and their inclusion in peace negotiations could reduce the chance that peace negotiations fall apart due to actions of the negotiators. This is particularly important in situations where the parties involved disagree on the reasons behind the conflict as well as the way to bring about peace, which is the case for many ongoing conflicts. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the NIWC, women are successful in building strong professional relationships with other negotiators and bringing conflicting sides together which ensures that support for the agreement is maintained throughout the process.

As well as being able to play the role of mediator throughout negotiations, the NIWC put forward numerous important issues which had previously been neglected, such as victims' rights and reconciliation. Fearon acknowledges that these issues were key when promoting the endorsement of the Agreement: 'it is arguable that if the agreement had not addressed these concerns, many people could have voted against it and thus jeopardised the greatest opportunity for peace in 30 years'.¹²⁷ Issues that affected the lives of civil society needed to be addressed in the Agreement in order for the "Yes" Campaign to be successful as they would earn public support for the Agreement and make a relapse of conflict less likely in the future.

¹²⁷ Kate Fearon, "Northern Ireland's Women's Coalition: Institutionalising A Political Voice And Ensuring Representation", *Accord*, no. 13 (2017): 78-81, http://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord%2013_16Northern%20Ireland%20women's%20coalition_2002_ENG.pdf.

Kilmurray states that, 'the NIWC's legacy is its freshness of perspective and solutions-focused approach—much needed in countries coming out of conflict. The coalition's achievements in creating workable outcomes for the long term should encourage people everywhere who seek solutions in peace negotiations so that they can rebuild their societies.'¹²⁸

Furthermore, members of the NIWC used the opportunity to utilise skills they had learned from community politics within the formal political sphere. The NIWC understood that it was crucial to engage civil society throughout the peace process in order to keep stay on track towards a successful agreement. Moreover, through their interaction with the communities and their own experiences of the conflict, members from the NIWC were able to determine the issues that had to be dealt with in order to ensure the public would support the Agreement.

Members of the NIWC were able to overcome the obstacles that came with being a bi-communal party. This demonstrates that women are able to put their differences aside in order to fight for peace and equality. The bi-communal nature of the Women's Coalition allowed its members to be proactive in the sense that they were the only party presenting solutions to Senator Mitchell on paper which were more likely to be acceptable to those on both sides of the conflict. They then used the professional relationships which they had built to ensure that these issues were included in the final draft of the Good Friday Agreement.

It is clear that parties to ongoing peace negotiations should consider the gap in the implementation phase of the Good Friday Agreement particularly with regards to the gender equality provisions. Accordingly, they should note that although an inclusive peace process can increase the likelihood of sustainable peace, it still may not be enough. Those involved in the negotiations must safeguard the agreed provisions in a legally binding document and this must be coupled with the political will to follow through with what has been agreed.

¹²⁸ Avila Kilmurray and Monica McWilliams, "Struggling For Peace: How Women In Northern Ireland Challenged The Status Quo", *The Solutions Journal* 2, no. 2 (2011), <https://www.thesolutionsjournal.com/article/struggling-for-peace-how-women-in-northern-ireland-challenged-the-status-quo/>.

The need for a paradigm shift in the dynamics of formal peace talks is an increasingly pressing issue as 'our collective failure to resolve conflict is giving birth to new threats and emergencies¹²⁹' and 'even in peaceful societies, the politics of fear is leading to dangerous polarization and demagoguery'.¹³⁰ Change is vital in order to keep up with the challenges the world is facing today due to the increasing complexity of ongoing conflicts. The fact that the Agreement brought about sustainable peace in Northern Ireland demonstrates that inclusive process would be a step forward for those involved in ongoing and future peace talks. As women make up more than half the world's population, it is incomprehensible that their inclusion in peacebuilding is not being prioritised due to their potential to bring new perspective and leadership to the table.

Overall, after conducting an in-depth investigation into women's impact on the peace negotiations that took place in Northern Ireland, it is clear that a radical change in the dynamics of peace processes is necessary. This has been highlighted by Nobhar Moustafa, leader of a Syrian women's organization and a member of the Women's Advisory Board who stated, 'The continued conflict in Syria is a fertile ground for terrorism. Any attempt to counter terrorism requires ending the conflict by revitalizing the political process'.¹³¹ The Northern Irish peace process suggests that women can bring a new positive dimension to the negotiations as they have proved to be effective intermediaries and tend to push for the incorporation of civil society issues into the agenda - rather than focusing solely on the central issues of the conflict. Parties to ongoing and future peace processes must learn from the past - including the peace talks in the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement - that when women are included in the peace process, it is more likely to be sustainable.

¹²⁹ Jean-Marie Guéhenno, "10 Conflicts To Watch In 2017", *Foreign Policy*, last modified 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/05/10-conflicts-to-watch-in-2017/>.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ "Women Of Syria, A Strong Constituency For Peace", *UN Women*, last modified 2016, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/9/women-of-syria-a-strong-constituency-for-peace>.

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